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ABSTRACT

Five recent studies included in this annotated bibliography highlight the diverse facets of an effective principal evaluation system. A technical report by Jerry W. Valentine and Michael L. Bowman includes a clinical instrument for assessing teachers' perception of principals' effectiveness. In a second report, Daniel L. Duke and Richard J. Stiggins give voice to pleas from principals that their chronic isolation from the central office be remedied by the institution of channels for ongoing communication. A report by Joseph Murphy and others examines the process of principal supervision and evaluation used by 12 California school districts whose student achievement scores are consistently excellent. A study by William C. Harrison and Kent D. Peterson examines the contrast between principals who were satisfied with their superintendents' handling of an evaluation procedure and those who were not. The final selection, a study by Mark E. Anderson, assimilates the lessons of previous research to layout a strategy for principal evaluation that balances accountability with the nurturing of professional development. The study also contains detailed descriptions of systems used by two highly regarded Oregon school districts to evaluate their principals, and offers recommendations for other interested districts. (MLF)

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Evaluating Principals

Carl Andrews

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RESEARCH roundup

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Evaluating Principals

Carl Andrews

A good deal of careful consideration and faith and trust went into the appointment of the local elementary school's principal. Being a principal is an enormous responsibility, but there is no doubt of this person's ability to handle the job. If the school board had harbored any reservations, the appointment would not have been made in the first place.

Too often, however, such confidence leads to laxity in maintaining and regularly refining a system for examining the principal's ongoing performance. That is a serious deficiency, for the fact is that a well-crafted principal evaluation system is important not only for the progress and welfare of the school's students and staff but for the progress and welfare of the principal involved. An evaluation system is essential to professional growth and progress. Administrators who do not regularly receive expert, constructive criticism and suggestions are denied important opportunities to expand their horizons; they are invited to stagnate.

To be truly useful, the evaluation must be based on clearly stated performance expectations, reflect established goals, and entail regular observations. In the event of deficient performance, the procedure needs to provide for a mutually agreed-upon plan for improvement; and for superior performance there should be suitable rewards.

Five recent studies of principal evaluation highlight these diverse facets of an effective principal evaluation system. One of the recurring themes the authors strike is the need for close district/school communication and coordination. They note that without regular communication in support of the principal's professional development—together with the frequent observation visits to the school that this involves—the superintendent would be hard put to acquire the multiple-source feedback needed for a comprehensive and credible evaluation.

One source of such feedback that principals themselves might capitalize on for making their own self-assessments—teachers—is made available in a technical report written by Jerry W. Valentine and Michael L. Bowman. Their paper includes a clinical instrument for asssessing teachers' perception of principals' effectiveness.

In the second report, Daniel Duke and Richard L. Stiggins identify several deficiencies of current principal evaluation practices. This study gives voice to pleas from principals that their chronic isolation from the central office be remedied by the institution of channels for ongoing communication.

A response to such pleas comes in a report by Joseph Murphy, Philip Hallinger, and Kent D. Peterson that examines the principal-supervision-and-evaluation processes used by twelve California school districts whose student achievement scores are consistently excellent. In these districts, supervision and evaluation procedures are used to obtain close coordination between district offices and the school.

The fourth study, by William C. Harrison and Kent D. Peterson, also stresses communication, though in this case with a special method of analysis. Focusing on a group of principals who had gone through the identical evaluation procedure, these researchers examined the contrast between those principals who were satisfied with the superintendent's handling of the procedure and those who were not. They thereby uncovered a distinct pattern of expectations that affect how principals respond to the influence and directives of the superintendent.

The final selection, by Mark E. Anderson, provides both an overview of research and practical

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knowledge of principal evaluation and detailed descriptions of two highly regarded approaches to principal evaluation. Encompassing a range of evaluation strategies, the report proves to be a useful reference work for assembling a new evaluation plan or refining an existing one.

Given the crucial role of the principal in determining the effectiveness of a school, it would seem vital that there be a valid, proven plan for evaluating and sustaining the effectiveness of the principal. These reports seek to provide insights into some of the most advanced current practice in this important area.

1 Valentine, Jerry W., and Michael L. Bowman. *Audit of Principal Effectiveness: A User's Technical Manual*, Columbia, Missouri: Valentine and Bowman Publishers, 1986. 18 pages. ED 281 319.

It is well documented that high achievers and effective leaders depend on frequent review of their goals and their progress toward those goals. They assess their own progress, and they also seek outside opinion. By means of the clinical instrument designed by Valentine and Bowman, principals can augment their self-assessment by collecting confidential teacher feedback and analyzing its significance. The authors suggest that a summary of perceived strengths and weaknesses drawn from this instrument might be supplied to the principal's supervisor in order to provide feedback useful in formulating appropriate professional development criteria. They also note, however, that most principals feel that teacher evaluations should not be directly communicated to the central office for evaluation purposes.

At any rate, the process used in creating the instrument is described in detail. The researchers surveyed teachers repeatedly, and the many issues addressed eventually coalesced into three basic domains: organizational development, organizational environment, and educational program.

The organizational environment domain includes leadership in setting the school's direction, linkage to the community, and organizational problem-solving.

The organizational environment domain includes such issues as the following: Does the principal establish and encourage collegial attitudes among teachers? Does he/she encourage student leadership? Does he/she keep communication channels open and flowing? Is the school image enhanced by the way he/she organizes school activities? Does he/she develop a sense of pride and loyalty in teachers and students?

The educational program domain includes developing curriculum, improving teacher skills, and analyzing student needs. A chart lists the relative perceived significance of each question, based on a statistical reliability index. Suggestions for effective use of the data complete the manual.

2 Duke, Daniel L., and Richard J. Stiggins. "Evaluating the Performance of Principals: A Descriptive Study." *Educational Administration Quarterly* 21,4 (Fall 1985): 71-98. EJ 329 615.

What do principals and their supervisors believe are the strong and weak points of current principal evaluation practices? To answer this question, Duke and Stiggins sent an extensive questionnaire to thirty participating Oregon school districts: ten with fewer than 1,000 students, ten with between 1,000 and 4,000 students, and ten with more than 4,000. Twenty-three questions sought respondents' views on eleven aspects of principal evaluation and professional development. Scores representing the responses were summarized, first for the entire sample, and then for supervisors, principals as a whole, elementary school principals, and secondary school principals.

Fewer than half of the principals felt that their evaluation processes were appropriately linked with the processes bearing on their professional development, though nearly all felt that these processes *ought* to be linked. Merit pay and advancement, held by many to be intrinsic parts of the evaluation/professional development link, were almost never perceived as being related to the evaluations. In fact, few districts reported *having* merit pay arrangements. The most common reward for superior performance was confidential commendation. According to the principals, lack of rewards was the largest shortcoming in current evaluation systems.

Another consideration was the establishment of goals. Generally, principals and supervisors differed on the purpose and direction of goal setting. Supervisors frequently emphasized deficiencies found in earlier evaluations and cumulative student test scores, as well as

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district goals. In larger districts, community needs and a specific conceptualization of the principalship were more frequently part of the goal-setting process.

Very few (7 percent) of the districts had developed clear definitions of the levels of principal performance coded on the evaluations—for example, "acceptable," "outstanding," and "deficient." This lack was regarded as a major problem by 44 percent of the principals studied.

The authors were dismayed by a lack of explicitness in communicating the supervisors' priorities to school principals. This ambiguity, combined with the lack of indepth observation of principals by supervisors, was taken by Duke and Stiggins to signal failure to communicate, and thus diminution of the credibility of the evaluation process.

Supporting the researchers' inference, many respondents cited shortage of time and resources as a barrier to ongoing communication between central offices and school offices. Onsite observation was least frequent in the larger districts. The authors noted that most of the superintendents performed the evaluations themselves or with one assistant superintendent, thus assuming a load of as many as thirty principals.

Altering extant administrative policies and personnel assignments were often suggested by principals as ways to remove the barriers to communication.

3 Murphy, Joseph; Philip Hallinger; and Kent D. Peterson. "Supervising and Evaluating Principals: Lessons from Effective Districts." *Educational Leadership* 43, 2 (October 1985): 78-82. EJ 327 943.

What are the distinguishing characteristics of the evaluation and supervisory processes in twelve California school districts that have a record of high student achievement? First of all, in such districts, supervisors (who in most cases are the superintendents) are able to spend a great deal of time at the principals' schools, observing both principals and teachers, conferring with principals, and getting a good sense of the prevailing climate for learning.

By their very presence, the supervisors give heightened meaning to the district's goal-setting and curriculum guidelines. The supervisory process is, in most cases, primarily oral and visual. This onsite communication gives supervisorial activities a specific focus on instruction and curriculum. Supervisors in most of the districts in the study actually spend time observing teachers as well as principals—a marked departure from all-too-common practice.

In contrast to the usual situation, the procedures and criteria for principal evaluation in these districts are well-defined and understood. Another departure from the norm is the use in these districts of group meetings of principals for peer communication, progress reports, and coordination with district goals. Much tighter coordination between school and district administration is a general result of the various unique activities in these districts, the authors found.

4 Harrison, William C., and Kent D. Peterson. "Complexities in the Evaluation of Principals: The Relationship between Satisfaction with the Evaluation Processes, Criteria, and Sources of Information." Paper presented at annual meeting of the American Educational Research Association, Washington, DC, April 1987. 26 pages. ED 286 276.

What kinds of communication do principals want and expect from their supervisors? How can supervisors communicate the purposes and benefits of the district's principal evaluation program in such a way as to inspire principal cooperation in carrying it out? To explore such questions, Harrison and Peterson focused on a state-mandated evaluation program, so as to separate communication processes from the procedural variables of evaluation. Using both open-ended and Likert-scaled questions, the authors recorded the opinions of 149 principals about their supervisors' evaluation processes.

Principals were asked what criteria they believed were used, what they thought were the sources of information the supervisors primarily relied upon, and what they perceived as being the purpose and focus of the evaluation.

Some principals were satisfied with the evaluation process, and some were not. From studying these two groups, a pattern emerged of expectations that the satisfied principals felt were being met and the dissatisfied principals felt were not being met. The list of expectations is as follows:

- use of clear performance criteria
- clear communication of what was expected of principals
- an ongoing appraisal process rather than an annual one-day or two-day process
- frequent communication from the superintendent—both laudatory and critical, as the situation warranted
- instructional leadership as the evaluative focus
- willingness to modify the operations and schedule of the evaluation process at the request of the principal
- a practice of supplying information to principals about what sources of data would be used and which performance outputs would be closely monitored
- frequent visits to the school by the superintendent
- reliance chiefly on sources of information inside the institution

The authors highlight such benefits of shared activities as direct observation and confer-

encing. When properly executed, they say, these onsite activities appear to be correlated with principal support of the evaluation process as a resource for professional development. Moreover, they say, these activities provide the communication necessary for the appraisal of principal effectiveness to be credible to its recipients.

5 **Anderson, Mark E.** *Evaluating Principals: Strategies to Assess and Enhance Their Performance.* Eugene: Oregon School Study Council, University of Oregon, April 1989. 53 pages.

Anderson assimilates the lessons of the previous studies, laying out the necessary tools and rules for engineering a sound strategy of principal evaluation. Conscious of the tightrope school districts must walk in designing an evaluation program that balances accountability with the nurturing of professional development, Anderson thoroughly addresses both of these aspects and presents successful methods for integrating them.

He shows how "formative" evaluation (aimed at improving principal performance) can help build strong linkages and commitment to achieving the district's long-range goals.

A detailed review of the varied purposes for evaluation reveals the need for specifying in writing the school system's values, purposes, philosophy toward evaluation, and expectations of principals. Anderson recommends involving a broad base of school personnel in the process of designing an evaluation system, and also consulting specialists in this field. Concerning the data collection phase of evaluation, Anderson emphasizes the importance of direct observation and peer supervision. He presents mixed reviews, however, on the assessment center approach, with its use of simulations and intensive feedback sessions. He suggests that if this approach is followed, it should be only one of several components of a comprehensive evaluation system.

How should the information collected be used? Anderson stresses the importance of ongoing communication through carefully planned conferences, agreeing with Valentine's assertion that the skilled evaluator promotes internal motivation by involving the principal in self-assessment. This is achieved through inquiry, probing questions, and comments.

A summative evaluation (the next phase) becomes a natural progression if evaluators have already identified areas for improvement and developed growth plans during the year.

Chapter 2 covers confidential feedback strategies that improve principal performance. One such tool, Anderson notes, is the *Excellent Principal Inventory* sponsored by BellSouth Corporation. This instrument for monitoring teacher perceptions is based on five key commitments—to student success, to teaching and learning, to school staff, to innovation, and to leadership.

In two other lengthy chapters, Anderson describes comprehensive systems used by two highly regarded Oregon school districts to evaluate their principals. The final chapter outlines recommendations for districts that want to improve their current principal evaluation methods.

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